A Peace-Offering

IN AN

APOLOGY and humble PLEA

FOR

INDULGENCE

AND

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

By ſundry PROTESTANTS differing in ſome things from the PRESENT ESTABLISHMENT about the Worſhip of GOD.

By Rev. John Owen, D.D.

Ambigua de Religione Capita quæ plurimum habere videntur obſcuritatis, tantis tamdiu animis decertata, apud Sapientes *hoc fere* Certum *reliquerunt, nuſquam minus inveniri veritatem, quam ubi* Cogitur Aſſenſus. *Hugo Grotius.*

Exiguam ſedem ſacris, littuſq; rogamus
Innocuum, & cunctis undamq; auramq; patentem.

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THE infinitely Wiſe and Holy GOD, who diſpoſeth of all things according to the counſel of his own Will, having deſigned our portion in the World unto the *latter dayes* thereof; wherein, beſides thoſe difficulties which in all Ages attend them who are called unto the ſearch and profeſſion of the *Truths of the Goſpel*, we are forewarned of *ſundry Evils* peculiar unto them, rendring them *perilous*: as it is our duty to apply our ſelves to ſerve his good pleaſure in our Generation, without repining at that ſtation which in his work he hath allotted unto us; ſo alſo diligently to take care, that we add not unto the *Evils of the dayes wherein we live*; and that, what we may be called to ſuffer in them according to his Will, may not be loſt unto his holy Ends and Purpoſes in the World, but ſome way or other redound unto his Glory. What ſhall befall us in the courſe of our Pilgrimage, how we ſhall be diſpoſed of, as to our outward temporary concernments, as it is not in *our power to order and determine*, ſo neither ought to be in our *care*, ſo as that we ſhould be anxiouſly ſolicitous thereabouts: All things of that nature belong unto his *ſoveraign Pleaſure*, who will make them work together for good to them that love him. Reſting in his Will as to our outward ſtate and condition in this world, with that of the *Times and Seaſons* wherein our Lot is fallen, which he hath put in his own power, we ſhall endeavour in reference thereunto, to *poſſeſs our Souls in patience*, waiting for that day which ſhall *manifeſt every mans work of what ſort it is*. And we know that it is but yet a little while, before it will be no grief of heart unto us, for to have done or *ſuffered any thing for the Name of the Lord Jeſus*, according to his mind and will. For whereas we are well aſſured, that the old Enemy of Mankind who is ſometimes *awake*, and *ſowing of Tares* whilſt Men ſleep, is never ſo far aſleep, whilſt any are endeavouring to ſow the good ſeed of the Goſpel, as not to ſtir up an oppoſiti-

on to their work, and to labour the ruine of their perſons; ſo we believe that every ſincere endeavour to promote the holy Truths, and Wayes of God, according to that meaſure of Light which he is pleaſed graciouſly to impart unto any of the Sons of Men, is accepted and owned by him, *who is a Rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him*; which is ſufficient to ſecure their peace and conſolation, under all the evils that on the account of their work they may conflict withal. Neither is it a ſmall alleviation of any trouble that we may be expoſed unto, that no pretence, colour, reaſon, or arguings for our ſufferings, no means, wayes, or kinds of them, no ends unto them, can poſſibly be invented, propoſed, purſued, but what we are fully *forewarned of*; that ſo we might not at any time think our ſelves ſurprized, as though ſome ſtrange thing had happened unto us. This then is our great concernment in the profeſſion of Religion, this that which we ought principally to attend unto, namely, *To commend our Conſciences unto God, that in all ſincerity and godly ſimplicity*, we exerciſe our ſelves in the Work that he calls us unto, not *corrupting his Word*, or ſtaining our profeſſion by a converſation unbecoming the holineſs of the Goſpel; and for what may outwardly befall us, though producing *Heavineſs and Sorrow for a ſeaſon*, the laſt day will manifeſt to have been unſpeakably more the concernment of other Men, than our own. It is therefore on this account, and that duty which we owe unto all the Sons of Men, eſpecially thoſe who in any place or degree have the rule and diſpoſal of us in this world and the things thereof, committed unto them, that notwithſtanding the hazard that attends us in the diſcharge of every duty of this kind, we adventure to repreſent our Condition and deſires unto all that endeavour to *follow after Truth with Peace*. For as the Minds of Men are capable of no greater Perfection, than what conſiſts in receiving the whole Truth of the Goſpel, nor their Souls of greater bleſſedneſs, than attends obedience thereunto, ſo every miſtake of it, every prejudice againſt it, every oppoſition unto it, or any part of it, are not only in themſelves a corruption and debaſement of the mind, but are uſually attended with conſequents of greater Evils, in and unto them by whom they are entertained. And this condition oftentimes are men, otherwiſe upright and wiſe, caſt into; either by their own ingrafted prejudices, or neglect of that ſevere diſquiſition after Truth, which all the Sons of it are obliged unto; or by ſuffering themſelves to be *impoſed* on, by the ſuggeſtions

geſtions of others, who perhaps ſacrifice their actings in and about the things of God, to ſome ſecular (and it may be very corrupt) ends of their own. Hence *Truth* and *Innocency*, which cannot be oppreſſed, but when cloathed with miſrepreſentations and calumnies, have in all Ages been forced to ſuffer the ſad effects of *their miſtakes*, who in the mean time profeſſed highly an avowment of them. So in particular, the foundation of all the miſeries that ever befell the Profeſſors of the Truth of Chriſt, ſince the day that the *Name of Chriſtian* was known in the World, and conſequently of all that evil and confuſion in the Earth, which the Luſts of men have produced, and the righteous Judgement of God inflicted, have lain in general, either in the ignorance of Men, of the genuine nature and tendency of the Truth it ſelf, or in their credulity, in giving credit unto thoſe *miſrepreſentations* of it, which it hath alwayes been the intereſt of many in the world, to frame and promote. Hence the Profeſſors of *Chriſtianity*, and every particular way therein, in their reſpective ſeaſons and generations, have eſteemed it their duty, not only unto Themſelves, to wave their imminent ſufferings, if it were the will of God thereby, but unto Others alſo, whom they judged to be engaged againſt God and his Truth, in their perſecution of them, to declare freely and fully what it was that they did believe and practiſe; and therein plead the equity and reaſonableneſs of that deliverance which they aimed at; of *Themſelves* from ſuffering, and of *Others* from ſinning. And herein had they before their eyes, the Example of *the Great Apoſtle of the Gentiles*, who with various ſucceſs did oft times make uſe of the like defenſatives of himſelf, and his Doctrine. Nor is it the leaſt preſcription of the *Law of Nature* implanted in the heart of man by him that made it, that *Innocency* ſhould ſo far undertake its own protection and ſecurity, as to endeavour a removal of prejudicate imputations out of the minds of them, in whoſe Judgement it is concerned. And this *Law*, all Men univerſally yield obedience unto, who intend not to abuſe ſuch imputations unto ſiniſter ends, not ſuitable unto the innocency they profeſs, and ſo by deſerting their own *unblamable defence*, contract a guilt rendring them incapable of it for the future. Whereas therefore it hath pleaſed him in *whoſe hand our life, and breath, and all our wayes are*, to place us in that condition, wherein by the apprehenſions he hath given us of his Mind and Will, in ſome things relating unto his Worſhip, we are forced to differ from

others, we conceive it our Duty for the prevention of farther Evils openly and candidly to declare both what we profeſs, and what in all humility we deſire thereupon: And we cannot but hope, that when the matters of our difference are known and conſidered, that they will not be judged of ſo high a demerit; as to render a modeſt peaceable deſire of *Indulgence* in our adherence unto them, a new addition of guilt. For their caſe is miſerable indeed, who being prejudged into a condition of ſufferings, though not convinced of evil, may not deſire relief from thoſe, who alone are able to afford it; that alſo being made an aggravation of their miſery, by being made an aggravation of their ſuppoſed guilt.

And in particular, this courſe is made at this ſeaſon neceſſary unto us, from the exaſperation of the minds of many, in reference unto what we profeſs and deſire, with the prejudices that are taken up and improved unto our diſadvantage and trouble: For although we have with the joynt Conſent of all our Churches ſome years ſince, publickly declared what is the Faith which we profeſs, and the Way of the Worſhip of God wherein we walk, and did hope that it would not be looked on as an unreaſonable expectation, that our *Confeſſion* might have received a Chriſtian charitable ſedate conſideration, before it were condemned, or thoſe that adhere unto it judged as evil-doers for their ſo doing; yet conſidering the ſad exaſperations of the Minds of Men, though upon occaſions wholly forreign to the matter of our Faith and Profeſſion, we cannot be without ſome apprehenſions, that far the greateſt part of thoſe who are *loudeſt* in their cryes for *ſeverity* againſt us, have ſcarce been ſo faithfull to Chriſtian Candor and Ingenuity, as ſeriouſly to examine whether there be in what we believe and practiſe, a juſt foundation for that kind of proceeding and acting towards us, which they ſo earneſtly deſire to engage our Rulers into. If for no other reaſon than, but to endeavour to call off the thoughts of Men from *Perſons*, and Perſonal Provocations, unto thoſe things which are the pretended foundation of their actions, and with reference whereunto, their Account muſt be made at the laſt Day, when other mens real or apprehended Miſcarriages will give no countenance to theirs, we cannot but judge it a Duty incumbent on us, to remind them what the things are which muſt give conſtruction unto all that in this matter they ſhall undertake or perform; and whereinto, under all imputations whatever of things of other natures, our *comfort*, be it what

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it will, true or falſe, in all our ſufferings that we may be called unto, is reſolved. And we do know, that they will one day find themſelves under a *woful miſtake*, who ſuppoſe that their ſeverity againſt us, will be any further juſtified, than there is ground for it in the *Principles* which we profeſs in the things of God; and this cannot but be evident unto them (if they will give themſelves but the liberty of unprejudiced conſideration) who know that a *relinquiſhment of thoſe Principles* would inſtantly cauſe all thoſe *other Pleas and Pretences* to vaniſh out of their minds, which *at preſent they only make uſe of*. And therefore alſo ſhall we not much concern our ſelves in any other charge that is laid againſt us, but only as to what we profeſs, and practiſe in the ways and worſhip of God, as knowing that from thence alone all occaſion is taken for them. We ſhall therefore only briefly declare our ſenſe of them, and then proceed to that which is our real concernment. For there is not *any new thing herein under the Sun*.

In all ages, where ever any way in Religion hath been judged by the moſt, rightly, or otherwiſe, to be contrary to the mind of God, as by them apprehended, it hath been immediately charged with the guilt of all the evils that fell out in the days of its profeſſion, though evidently they had other Cauſes and Occaſions. Such was the condition of *Chriſtianity* in general of old, as is manifeſt from the *Apologetical* Writings of *Juſtin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, *Arnobius*, *Cyprian*, *Lactantius*, *Minutius Fœlix*, *Auguſtine*, and others. Upon every occaſion of trouble, the common cry was, *Chriſtianos ad Leones*. Such was alſo the condition of the Profeſſors of the Proteſtant Religion, upon the firſt Reformation, throughout the world; under which prejudice and imputation, they are yet forced to ſuffer the wrath of men in many places. What ever diſadvantages then on this account we may be expoſed unto, we have no reaſon to complain or think ſtrange of, it being no other than all men in the like condition in all ages have had to conflict withall; and will have ſo, whilſt ſin and darkneſs continue in the world. To commend our conſciences unto God in well-doing, is the only means of peace in our ſelves, and the whole *Defenſative* in reference unto others, which in this caſe is left unto us.

Moreover if any who either really make profeſſion of *any way* in Religion, or are generally eſteemed ſo to do, fall into perſonal crimes and miſcarriages, which *no way* can ſecure it ſelf againſt, men juſtly provoked thereby have ſcarce the patience to attend unto any plea for the *way* it ſelf, or thoſe who peaceably and innocently walk therein,

in, though the charge againſt it be altogether groundleſs and unreaſonable. Thus the abominations of the *Gnoſticks* of old, was charged upon the whole body of Chriſtianity; and the unwarrantable zeal of one man in firing a Temple in the Kingdom of *Perſia*, reflected an imputation of *Sedition* on all the Profeſſors of the Goſpel, to their extirpation out of that Empire. But the unrighteouſneſs of this charge is, we hope, evident even to themſelves, who would fain make uſe of it unto our diſadvantage; for *no Society in the world* can give ſecurity for the deportment of all *Individuals* belonging unto it, according unto the Rules of the whole; and if they may be charged with ſuch miſcarriages, it were eaſie to demonſtrate, that no *Community*, no *Profeſſion* of men in the world, no *Order*, no *Way* can be acquitted from guilt, or thought meet to have moderation exerciſed towards it. Beſides, we know not in particular, but that all occaſions of reflecting upon *our Societies* on this account, have, by the goodneſs of God been prevented, for which we are humbly thankful unto his holy Majeſty. But if to accuſe be enough to render any men nocent, none can be long innocent. *Thyeſtean Banquets, promiſcuous Luſts and Inceſts*, muſt on that ground be thought to be the Ends of the *Primitive Aſſemblies of Chriſtians*. If men will take to themſelves the liberty of entertaining evil and groundleſs ſurmizes, it is impoſſible for us, or any living, to ſet bounds to their imaginations. So that we have nothing in this caſe to do, but to leave the Authors of ſuch falſe and calumnious inſinuations unto that Reward, which God and their own Conſciences will not ſuffer them to loſe; and our Vindication unto the *Providence of God*, over our *preſent* and *future deportment*. It may be thought of nearer concernment unto us, when the *late troubles in theſe Nations* are objected, and the remembrance of them renewed unto our prejudice. But whether the frequent and importunate urging of them, ſince by his *Majeſty's Clemency and Grace* they are put into *Legal Oblivion* for ever, do tend unto the compoſure and ſettlement of the minds of men, which is certainly the duty of all good Subjects to aim at, we leave it unto the conſideration of thoſe who are wiſer than we, and on whom the care of *the peace and welfare of the Kingdom* is in an *eſpecial manner incumbent*. For our own parts, we ſhall only ſay, That whereas they were neither begun, nor carried on, upon the account of that *way in the worſhip of God* which we profeſs; may the remembrance of them be never ſo *ſeverely* revived, we cannot fear any juſt concluſion from thence, unto a ſuſpition of *Troubles of the like nature*

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for the future; as well knowing the *absolute freedom* of our *Principles from any such tendency, as well as the providential unravelling of all those interwoven Interests and Occasions, which individual persons countenanced themselves withall in their engagements in them.*

Magistracy we *own*, as *the Ordinance* of *God*, and *His Majesty* as *the Person* set over us by his *Providence*, in *the Chief and Royal Administration* thereof: In *submission unto Him*, we profess it our *Duty* to regulate our *Obedience* by *the Laws and Customs* over which *He* presides in the *Government* of these *Nations*. So that OUR PRACTICAL ADHERENCE UNTO OUR OWN AVOWED PRINCIPLES, is all that in this matter can fall under *the most suspicious and uncharitable surmize*. That there is any means of giving such absolute satisfaction concerning *future events*, which depend on the minds and wills of men, as to leave *all suspicion* concerning them impossible, we know not; much less to prevent some mens *pretending suspicions* for ends best known unto *themselves*. But this we know, that what ways or means soever are warranted, or established by *the Laws of this Land*, or may be so, and they are such as *mankind* must *content themselves withall*, as incapable of *further or greater assurance*, or *what ever else* may be *rationally* and *justly* expected from us, we *have given*, and are *ready* to *give security by*, against the Evils intimated in this *Charge* upon us; which being *the utmost that our Duty calls upon us for*, we *hope* we shall *not always suffer* for being *the unhappy objects* of *some mens* GROUNDLESS JEALOUSIES, which for *us to remove is altogether impossible*, God himself having not appointed any way or means for us to use to that end or purpose.

As then neither *we* nor *others* can hinder men from making use of *this Pretence* for *some ends of their own*, (though we *know*, as it is *used by them*, it contributes nothing to Publick Tranquility, and *the composure of the minds of men*) so *we hope* that GOD will so far in his *good* time clear up *the Innocency and Sincerity* of our *Intentions*, and their suitableness unto our declared Principles, that *no just occasion of reproach* be administred unto *Them*, who wait for *Advantages* against us.

And what are We, that Publick Disturbance should be feared from us? *Nec pondera rerum, nec momenta sumus*: by what way or means, were we never so desirous, could we contribute any thing thereunto? what *Designs* are we capable of? what *Interests* have we to pursue? what *Assistance* to expect or look after? what *Title* to pretend? what hopes of *Success*? what *Reward* of any *hazard* to be undergone? We

have no Form of Government, *Civil* or *Eccleſiaſtical*, to impoſe on the Nation; nay, no *pretence* unto *Power* to be exerciſed on the *Perſons* of any of his *Majeſties Subjects*; have no *Expectations* from *Perſons* or *Nations*, that might induce us to further or promote any ſiniſter aims of *other men*: the utmoſt of our aim is but to paſs the reſidue of our Pilgrimage in peace, ſerving God in the way of our Devotion. We covet no mens ſilver or their gold, their places or preferments: our whole deſire is that of *Iſrael* of old to their brother *Edom*, *Let us paſs, we pray, through the Country; we will not paſs through the fields or through the vine-yards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells; we will go by the Kings high way, we will not turn to the right hand, nor to the left, until we have paſſed thy borders.* May we thus far prevail, under the protection of God's providence, his Majeſty's favour, and our own innocency; we *have* no Principles, we *ſhall* have no Reaſon, farther to trouble our ſelves or others. If it be denied unto us, and we muſt yet be ſcattered over the face of the earth, we ſhall pray for the proſperity of his *Majeſty*, and the *Land of our Nativity*, patiently bearing the indignation of the Lord, againſt whom we have ſinned, and *waiting for his ſalvation.*

That which of late is principally urged unto our prejudice, is, *The prohibition of that way of worſhip which we deſire to walk in, and the eſtabliſhment of another by LAW, to whoſe Authority we owe ſubjection.* When this begins once to be pleaded, the real merits of the cauſe in debate is uſually over-ſeen, and the obedience required by *Law* is only inſiſted on; as though that were grown a *Civil difference* by the interpoſition of a Law, which before was purely Religious. This *Paul* himſelf found to be one of the moſt difficult caſes he had to contend withall; it was objected unto him, that he taught *Cuſtoms which it was not lawful for to do among the Romans*, *Acts* 16. 21. All that Doctrine which he had to declare, was antecedently in general forbidden by Law; it being determined by the *Romans*, That *no worſhip of God ſhould be admitted amongſt them, not eſtabliſh'd by Publick Authority.* And had not the Light and Truth of *Chriſtianity* broken through that oppoſition, it muſt have lain ſhut up in darkneſs to this day. For our parts, we have only this to ſay, That there is no reaſon to urge this as a *peculiar Objection* againſt us, it being the *only Foundation* of all others, and only occaſion of the difference about which we treat. Had not a *Law* enjoyned the practice of ſome things in the Worſhip of God, which according unto our preſent Light we cannot aſſent

assent unto, without ceasing to worship him, (for to worship him in our own thoughts, against his mind and will, is to prophane his Name and Worship) had it not forbidden the exercise and discharge of some duties which we account our selves obliged unto by the Authority of God himself, we had had no need to implore the clemency of our Governours, to relieve us against that severity which we fear. This then we acknowledge; but withall, to state this Difference upon its right foundation, do solemnly in all sincerity protest before God, his holy Angels, and all the world, That it is not out of any *unwarrantable Obstinacy* that we are conscious of unto our selves; nor from any disaffection unto, or dissatisfaction in the Government that God hath set over us: but meerly from a sense of that account which we have one day to make before JESUS CHRIST, the JUDGE of All, that we cannot yield that compliance unto the *Act for Uniformity* which it requireth of us. The *Case* then, notwithstanding this prejudice, is still the same; *Conscience* towards God in the things of his own Worship, is still, and alone concerned, whatever other pretences and reasonings may in this case be made use of, (as many are, and ever were in the like cases, and will so be) the whole real cause of that severity which we humbly deprecate, and only Reason lying against the Indulgence we desire, is our Profession and Practice in the things that *are not of this world*, but purely relating to the Revelation of the Mind and Worship of GOD. What-ever therefore men may plead, pretend or urge of another nature, we are so far conscious unto our own Integrity, as to be fully satisfied in our minds, That what-ever *Dangers* we may be in this matter exposed unto, or what-ever we may be called to suffer, it is all meerly for *believing in God*, and worshipping of him, according to what he hath been pleased to reveal of his mind unto us. And as in this case, it is not in the power of any of the sons of men to deprive us of that *Consolation*, which an apprehension of the truth will afford unto them that sincerely and conscientiously embrace it; so whether any men can commend their consciences to God, according to the Rules of the blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our molestation and trouble, we leave it unto all unprejudiced men to judge. And that we may yet farther remove all grounds of mistake, and obviate all other pretences against us, we shall candidly declare the general Principles both of our Faith and Worship, and then leave our condition, whatever it may be, to the Judgment of him, who *hath appointed a day*

wherein he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs, of his Majeſty whom he hath ſet over us in ſupream Power, and of all other Perſons whatever, who have any ſenſe of the Terror of the Lord, the account we muſt make of ſerving Him according to what He is pleaſed to reveal of himſelf unto us, the nature of things known only by Divine Revelation, or of the *infirm frail condition of Mankind* in this World.

For the *Faith* which we *profeſs*, and which we deſire *to walk according unto*, we need not inſiſt upon the particular heads of it; having ſome years ſince in our *Confeſſions* publickly declared it, with *the joynt conſent of all our Churches*, neither do we own or avow any *Doctrine*, but what is therein *aſſerted* and *declared*. And we hope it will not be looked upon as an *unreaſonable Requeſt*, if we humbly deſire, That it may receive a Chriſtian charitable ſedate conſideration, before it be condemned. May we be convinced of any thing therein, not agreeable unto the Scriptures, not taught and revealed in them, we ſhall be with the firſt in its rejection. That this hath been by any as yet attempted, we know not; and yet are we judged, cenſured and reproached upon the account of it: So far are Men degenerated from that frame of Spirit, which was in the *Chriſtians of old*; ſo far have they relinquiſhed the wayes wherein they walk towards thoſe who diſſented from them.

Nor do we decline the Judgement of the *Primitive Church*; being fully ſatisfied, That we teach and adhere unto, is as conſonant unto the Doctrine thereof, as that of any Church at this day in the World. The *four firſt General Councels*, as to what was determined in them in matters of Faith, are confirmed by *Law* in this Nation; which is all that from *Antiquity* hath any peculiar ſtamp of *Authority* put upon it amongſt us; This alſo we willingly admit of, and fully aſſert in our *Confeſſion*. Neither doth the addition of ours, diſturb the *Harmony* that is in the *Confeſſions* of the Reformed Churches, being in all material points the ſame with them, and no otherwiſe differing from any of them in things of leſs importance, than as they do one from another; and as all Confeſſions have done, ſince the firſt introduction of their uſe into the Churches of God. That which amongſt them is of moſt ſpecial regard and conſideration unto us, is that of the *Church of England*, declared in the *Articles of Religion*: And herein in particular, what is purely *Doctrinal*, we fully embrace, and conſtantly adhere unto. And though we ſhall not compare our

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ſelves with others, in Ability to aſſert, teach and maintain it; yet we cannot, whilſt we are conſcious unto our ſelves of our Integrity in our cordial adherence unto it, but bear with regret the *Clamorous Accuſations* of ſome againſt us, for departing from *the Church of England*, who have not given that teſtimony of their adherence unto *Its Doctrine*, which we have done, and by the help of God ſhall continue to do. It is true indeed, there are ſome *Enlargements* in our Confeſſion of the things delivered in the Thirty Nine Articles; ſome Additions of things not expreſly contained in them, which we were neceſſitated unto, for the full declaration of our Minds, and to obviate that *obloquy* which otherwiſe we might have been expoſed unto, as reſerving our Judgement in matters that had received great publick debate ſince the compoſure of thoſe Articles: But yet we are fully perſwaded, that there is not any propoſition in our whole Confeſſion, which is repugnant unto any thing contained in the Articles, or is not by juſt conſequence deducible from them. Neither were we the *Authors* of the Explanations or Enlargements mentioned; there being nothing contained in them, but what we *have learned* and been inſtructed in from the Writings of the moſt famous *Divines* of this Nation, *Biſhops* and *Others*, ever ſince the Reformation; which being publiſhed by *Legal Authority*, have been alwayes eſteemed, both at home and abroad, faithfully to repreſent the Doctrine of the *Church of England*. We have *no new Faith* to *Declare*, *no new Doctrine to Teach*, *no private Opinions to Divulge*; no Point, or Truth do we Profeſs, *no not one*, which hath not been declared, taught, divulged and eſteemed as the common Doctrine *of the Church of England* ever ſince the Reformation.

If then we evince not the *Faith we profeſs* to be conſonant unto *the Scriptures, the Doctrine of the Primitive Church, of the four firſt General Councels, the Confeſſions of the Reformed Churches beyond the Seas, and that in particular of the Church of England*, we ſhall acknowledge the Condition of Things in reference unto that Liberty, which we humbly deſire, to be otherwiſe ſtated, than hitherto we have apprehended. But if this be the condition of our *Profeſſion*, as we hope it is manifeſt unto all Unprejudiced and Ingenious Perſons to be, who eſteem it their Duty not to judge a matter of ſo great importance before they hear it. We can hardly think that They give up Themſelves to the Conduct of the Meek and Holy Spirit of CHRIST, who are ready to breathe out Extirpation againſt us, as to our Intereſt *in this*

World, for the profession of *Those Principles* in the things of God, which They pretend to build their own Interests upon *for another*.

The NON-CONFORMITY then that we may be charged with, being very remote from a dissent unto that Doctrine which is here publickly avowed, and confirmed by Law, it cannot but seem strange unto us, that any should endeavour to cast us under the *same severity* with them who utterly renounce it: and would entayl upon their Posterity, on the forfeiture of all their Publick Rights, as *English-Men*, and benefit of their private Estates, not only an adherence unto the *Protestant Religion*, but a Precise and Determinate Judgement and Practice in things of very *Little* Concernment therein; and of *none* at all, as to publick Tranquility.

Would it not seem strange, that a man might at as easie and cheap a rate, renounce the *Protestant Profession*, and the *Fundamental Doctrines* of the *Church of England*, in things indispensably necessary to Salvation, as to be mistaken, or suspend his assent about *things dark and disputable in their own nature*, and of *very small importance, which way soever they are determined?* So that Men in the *embracing* or *refusal* of them, rebel not against that *commanding Light of God* set up in their hearts to rule them in His Name, in that apprehension which they have of the Revelation of his Will, which is unto them *of great and eternal moment*.

They are then only things relating unto *Outward Order and Worship*, wherein our *dissent* from the *present Establishment* of *Religion*, doth consist; things about which there hath been *variety* of Judgement, and *difference* in Practice, from the days of the Apostles, and probably will be so untill the end of the World: For we find by experience, that the late *Expedient* for the ending of differences about them, by vindicating of them into the *arbitrary disposal* of every *Church*, or those that preside therein, in whose *Determinations* all persons are to acquiesce; is so far from accomplishing the work whereunto it is designed, that it contributes largely to their increase and perpetuation. Our only guilt then is, Our *Not agreeing with others* in those things wherein there never yet was an agreement among *Christians*: Nor, perhaps, had they all that frame of Spirit in Moderation and mutual Forbearance which *the Gospel requireth in them*, would it ever be any way needful that there should so be.

For our parts, about these things we *judge not* other men, nor do, or ever did seek to *impose our apprehensions on their Judgements or Practice*.

tice. What in them is agreeable unto Truth, *God knows*, and will one day declare. Unto our *present Light* in the Revelation of His *Will*, muſt our practice be conformed, unleſs to pleaſe Men, and ſecure our tranſitory, periſhing Concernments, we intend to break his Bonds, and caſt away his Cords from us.

And that it may the better appear what is both our Judgement and Practice, in and about theſe things; unto what we have declared in the cloſe of our *Confeſſion*, (which we ſuppoſe they cannot reaſonably and with ſatisfaction to their own Conſciences, wholly overlook, who becauſe thereof, are ready to reflect with ſevere thoughts upon us) we ſhall now only add, The *General Principles* whereunto all that we profeſs or practiſe in theſe things, is reſolved. And of them we humbly deſire, that a Chriſtian and Candid Conſideration may be had: As ſuppoſing that to paſs a *Sentence of Condemnation* againſt us for our diſſent unto any thing, without a previous weighing of the Reaſons of that diſſent, is ſcarce ſuitable unto that Law whereby we are Men, and engaged into Civil Societies. As then Religion is publickly received and eſtabliſhed in this Nation, there are many *outward Concernments* of it, relating unto *Perſons* and *Things*, that are diſpoſed and regulated by and according to the Laws thereof: Such is that which is called, *Power Eccleſiaſtical*, or Authority to diſpoſe of thoſe *Affairs of the Church* with *coercive* Juriſdiction, which relates to the *outward publick Concernments* of it, and the Legal intereſts of Men in them. This we acknowledge and own to be veſted in the Supream Magiſtrate, the *Kings Majeſty*, who is the Fountain and Spring of all *Juriſdiction* in his own Kingdoms what-ever. No power can be put forth or exerciſed towards any of his Subjects, which in the manner or nature of its exertion, hath the force of a Law, Sentence, or Juriſdiction; or which, as to the effect of it, reacheth either their Bodies, Eſtates, or Liberties, but what is derived from him, and binding *formaly* on that ſole Reaſon, and no otherwiſe.

Hence we have no Principle in the leaſt ſeducing us to tranſgreſs againſt any of thoſe Laws which in former dayes were looked on as *ſafe Preſervatives* of the *Proteſtant Religion and Intereſt in this Nation.* Did we aſſert a *Foreign Power* over his Majeſties Subjects, and claim an obedience from them in ſome ſuch caſes as might at our pleaſure be extended to the whole that is due unto Him; Did we, or any of us, by vertue of any *Office* we hold in *the Church of God*, claim and exerciſe

exerciſe a *Juriſdiction* over the Perſons of his Majeſties Subjects in Form and Courſe of Law; Or did we ſo much as pretend unto *the exerciſe* of any Spiritual Power that ſhould produce effects on the Outward Man; We might well fear, leſt juſt offence ſhould be taken againſt us. But whereas the way wherein we worſhip God is utterly unconcerned in theſe things, and we willingly profeſs the Spring of all *Outward Coercive Juriſdiction*, to be in *the Perſon of the Kings Majeſty alone*, without the leaſt intermixture of any other Power of the ſame kind, directly or by conſequence; we cannot but ſay with confidence, That it will be utterly impoſſible to convince us, That on this account we are Offendors.

For the Worſhip of God, and Order therein, (which is *purely Spiritual and Evangelical*) we acknowledge indeed *the Lord Jeſus Chriſt* to be the only *Inſtitutor* or *Author* of it, and the holy Scripture the *only Principle* revealing, the *only Rule* to judge of it, and to ſquare it by. It is not now our deſign to plead the Truth of this Principle, nor yet to clear it from miſtakes, or vindicate it from oppoſition: All which are done elſewhere. Let it be ſuppoſed to be an *Error* or *Miſtake*, which is *the worſt that can be ſuppoſed of It*; we muſt needs ſay, That it is an *Error* which hath ſo much ſeeming countenance given unto it by innumerable places of Scripture, and by ſo many Teſtimonies of the Antient and Modern Doctors of *the Church*, and is every way ſo free from the production of any Conſequent of evil importance; That if there be any *faylure* of *the Minds of Men*, in and about *the things of God*, which from a common ſenſe of *the frailty of Humane Nature*, may rationally expect forbearance and pardon from them, who have the happineſs to be from all miſcarriage of that kind (*if any ſuch there be*) this may claim a ſhare and intereſt among them.

Nor are we able as yet to diſcern, how any acceptable account can be given to the Lord Jeſus, at the laſt day, of ſeverity againſt *This Principle*, or thoſe that otherwiſe inoffenſive, walk according to the Light of it.

Moreover, Whereas Principles *True* in *Themſelves*, may in their application unto Practice be preſſed to give countenance unto that which directly they lead not unto; We have the advantage yet farther particularly to declare, That in the purſuit of it in the Worſhip of God we have no other Ordinances or Adminiſtrations, but what are *by the Law and Church of England*. Now whatever other occaſion may be

be ſought againſt us, (which we pray God not to lay to their charge who delight in ſuch practices) we know full well that we differ in nothing from the whole form of *Religion eſtabliſhed in England*, but only in ſome few things in outward Worſhip, wherein we cannot conſent without the renunciation of this Principle, of whoſe *falſhood* we are not convinced. This being our *only crime*, if it be a crime, this the *only miſtake* that we are charged with, in the things of God; we yet hope that ſober men will not judge it of ſo high a demerit, as to be offended with our humble deſire of Indulgence, and a ſhare in that Princely favour towards perſons of tender conſciences, which his Majeſty hath often declared his Inclinations for.

We confeſs that oftentimes, when ſuch *Diſſents* are made a *crime*, they are quickly eſteemed the *greateſt*, yea, almoſt *all* that is criminal: but whether ſuch a Judgment owes not it ſelf more to *Paſſion*, *Prejudice*, and *private Intereſt*, than to right Reaſon, is not hard to determine.

For our parts, as we ſaid before, they are no great things which we deſire for our ſelves, the utmoſt of our aim being to paſs the remainder of the few days of our Pilgrimage in the *Land of our Nativity*, ſerving the Lord according to what he hath been pleaſed to reveal of his mind and will unto us. And we ſuppoſe that thoſe who are forward in ſuggeſting counſels to the contrary, know not well how to *countervail the Kings dammage*.

That this our deſire is neither *unreaſonable nor unjuſt*; that it containeth nothing contrary to the will of God, the practice of the Church of old, or to the diſadvantage of the publick tranquility of *theſe Nations*: but that all outward violence and ſeverity on the account of our *diſſent*, is deſtitute of any firm foundation in *Scripture*, *Reaſon*, or *the preſent juncture of Affairs amongſt us*, we humbly crave liberty, in the further purſuit of our own JUST DEFENCE, briefly to declare and evidence.

The great *Fundamental Law* amongſt men, from which all others ſpring, and whereby they ought to be regulated, is that *Law of Nature*, by which they are diſpoſed unto *Civil Society*, for the good of the whole and every individual Member thereof. And this good being of the greateſt importance unto all, doth unſpeakably outballance thoſe *Inconveniencies* which may befall any of them through a reſtriction put upon them by the particular Laws and

Bonds of the *Society* wherein they are engaged. It is not impoſſible, but that ſundry perſons might honeſtly improve many things unto their advantage in the increaſe of their intereſt in things of this world, were not bounds ſet unto their endeavours, by the Laws of the Community whereof they are members. But whereas no *Security* may be obtained that they ſhall not have their particular limits and concernments broken in upon by an hand of violence and injuſtice, but in a purſuit of that *Principle of Nature*, which directs them to the only *Remedy of that Evil* in *Civil Society*, they are all in general willing to fore-go their *particular advantages*, for that which gives them *Aſſurance* and *Peace* in all that they are, and enjoy beſides. All ſuch conveniencies therefore as conſiſt in the things that are within the power of men, and are inferiour to that Good and Advantage which *Publick Society* doth afford, the *Law of Nature directing men unto their chiefeſt Good*, commands them, as occaſion requires, to forbear and quit. Nor can any *Community be eſtabliſhed* without *obedience* unto that *command*. But of the things that *are not within the power of men*, there is another reaſon. If the Law of Society did require that all men engaging thereunto ſhould be of *one ſtature and form of viſage*, or ſhould have the ſame meaſure of *Intellectual abilities*, or the ſame conception of all objects of a rational underſtanding, it were utterly impoſſible that any *Community* ſhould ever be raiſed among the ſons of men.

As then all inconveniencies, yea, and miſchiefs relating unto things *within the power of men*, are to be undergone and born with, that are leſs than the Evils which nothing but *Political Societies* can prevent for the ſake thereof: So the allowance of thoſe Differences which are inſeparable from the nature of man, as diverſified in Individuals, and inſuperable unto any of their endeavours, is ſuppoſed in the Principles of its being and conſtitution. Yea, this is one *Principle of the Law of Nature*, to which we owe the Benefits of humane Converſation and Adminiſtration of Juſtice, that thoſe differences amongſt men, which unto them are abſolutely unavoidable, and therefore in themſelves not intrenching upon, nor diſannulling the good of the whole, (for nature doth not interfere with itſelf) ſhould be forborn and allowed among them, ſeeing an endeavour for their extinguiſhment muſt irreſiſtibly extinguiſh the Community itſelf, as taking away the main ſuppoſal on which it is founded. And in that *harmony*, which by an anſwe-

rableneſs

rableneſs of one thing unto another, riſeth from ſuch differences, doth the chiefeſt glory and beauty of Civil Society conſiſt; the ſeveral particulars of it alſo being rendred uſeful unto the whole thereby. Of this nature are the things concerning which we diſcourſe. They relate, as is confeſſed, unto *things ſpiritual and ſupernatural:* that the will of God in *theſe things* cannot be known but by Revelation from himſelf, all men will acknowledge: and we ſuppoſe they will with no leſs readineſs conſent, That *Divine Revelation cannot be apprehended or aſſented unto, but according to the nature and meaſure of that light, which God is pleaſed to communicate unto them, unto whom ſuch Revelation is made:* That *this Light* doth ſo equally affect *the minds of all men,* or *that it is poſſible it ſhould do ſo,* conſidering the divers ways and means of its communication, with the different diſpoſitions of them that receive it, that they ſhould all have the ſame apprehenſions of the things propoſed *unto them, none* will *judge,* but *ſuch* as take up *their profeſſion* in *theſe things* on Cuſtom, Prejudice or Intereſt. It will then hence evidently follow, That mens *apprehenſions of things ſpiritual and ſupernatural,* ſuch, we mean, as have no alliance unto the ingrafted Light of Nature, are not abſolutely under *their own power,* or depend *on the liberty of their wills,* whereunto all Law is given. And therefore is the diverſity in and about them to be reckoned among *thoſe unavoidable differences* which are ſuppoſed in *the Law of Civil Society,* and without which ſuppoſal, every attempt for any ſuch Society would be deſtructive of it ſelf. Among *theſe apprehenſions,* and the exerciſe of our conſciences towards God upon *them,* lies all the difference from the preſent Eſtabliſhment, which we deſire an *Indulgence* to be ſhewed towards; not at all queſtioning but that it is lawful for them who have attained unto an *agreement* in them, ſo far as they have attained, to confirm and ſtrengthen that agreement among themſelves, and render it deſirable unto others, by all ſuch ways and means as by right, and the Laws of the Society whereof they are, they may make uſe of.

And it is, as we humbly conceive, in vain pretended, *That it is not the apprehenſions of mens minds, and their conſciences unto God upon them, but only their outward Actings that fall under the Penalties deſired by ſome to be indiſpenſably impoſed on Diſſenters from the Eſtabliſhed Form;* ſeeing *thoſe penalties* are not only annexed unto Actions, which thoſe apprehenſions require, as *Duties unto God,*

but also unto a *not acting* contrary unto them, which directly and immediately reflect on the Mind and Conscience it self: other wayes to reach the *Consciences of their Brethren*, it is utterly impossible to find out. And to teach men that their Consciences towards God are not concerned either in *not acting* according to their Light in his Worship, or in *acting against* it, is to teach them to be Atheists.

We cannot therefore but hope that our distance from the present Establishment, in some few things relating unto *Supernatural Revelation*, (especially whilst in our agreement with it, there is a salve for all things in the least intrenching on the Light of Nature, and all things whatever, that even of Revelation itself, are necessary to the grand end of it, with Security against any thing that may any way incommodate Publick Tranquility) being unto us insuperable, and therefore provided for by the Fundamental Law of all Civil Societies, that it will not alwayes receive so severe a construction as to deprive us of the Good and Benefit thereof. For to annex Penalties, which in their progress will deprive men of all those advantages in their outward Concernments which Publick Society doth or can afford, unto those Differences, without a supposition whereof, and provision for, there could be no such Society at all, is to destroy that whose good and preservation is intended.

And therefore the different Conceptions of the Minds of Men in the things under consideration, with actings consonant unto them, being not only an unavoidable Consequent of Natures constant production of the Race of Mankind, in that various diversity which in all instances we behold, but also rendered farther insuperable, from the nature of *the things themselves about which they are exercised*, (being of Divine Revelation) they were ever in the World esteemed without the Line of *Civil Coercion* and Punishment, untill it came to the Interest of some to offer Violence to those Principles of Reason in Themselves, which any outward Alteration in the state of things, is capable of rendring their own best Protection and Defence.

And on these Grounds, it is, That FORCE never yet attained, or long kept that in RELIGION which it aimed at.

And the Great *Roman Historian* tells us, That it is *Indecorum Principi*

Principi adtrectare, quod non obtineat; No way honourable unto a Soveraign Prince, to attempt that which will never be accompliſhed.

But becauſe what may ſeem obſcure in this Reaſon of things and Principles of Community, (which uſually affect Them only, who without Intereſt or Prejudice, give up Themſelves to the Conduct of Rational and Sedate Conſideration, with which ſort of Perſons *alone*, we have not to deal) is exemplified in the GOSPEL, whoſe furtherance is on all Hands pretended; We ſhall thence alſo briefly manifeſt, that the way pretended for the promotion of its Intereſt, by *Severity in external Penalties*, on the account of ſuch Differences as we are concerned in, is both oppoſite unto the Spirit of its Author, and contrary to the Rules of it, with the Practice of Thoſe who have walked according to them.

As among the many bleſſed Ends of the *Converſation of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in the Fleſh*, it was not of the leaſt moment, that he might ſet us a *Pattern*, and give us an example of that Frame of Heart, and Holineſs of Life, whereby we may become like unto our HEAVENLY FATHER, and be acceptable before Him; ſo in his carrying on of that Deſign, there was not any thing that he more *emphatically* called upon his Diſciples to endeavour a Conformity unto him in, than in his *Meekneſs*, *Lowlineſs*, *Gentleneſs*, and *Tenderneſs* towards all. Theſe he took all occaſions for our good to ſhew forth in Himſelf, and commend unto Others. Whatever Provocation He met withall; whatever injurious Oppoſition He was expoſed unto, He did not *contend*, nor *cry*, nor *cauſe his Voyce to be heard* with Striſe or Anger. The *Sins* of Men indeed, He reproved *with all Authority*, their groundleſs Traditions in the Worſhip of God, He rejected; their Errors He refuted by the Word: But to the *Perſons* of Men, He was alwayes *Meek* and *Tender*, as coming to *Save*, and not *Deſtroy*; to *keep Alive*, and not to *Kill*. In the Things of *Man*, He referred all unto the Juſt Authority and Righteous Laws of Men; but in the Things of *GOD*, never gave the leſt intimation of *Severity*, but only in his *Holy Threats* of future Evil in the World to come, upon Mens Final Impenitency and Unbelief. COERCE, FINE, IMPRISON, BANISH, *Thoſe that apprehend not aright all and every thing that I would have you inſtructed in*; are Words that never proceeded out

of His holy Mouth, Things that never entered into His gracious Heart. And we are perſwaded, that it is a thing of marvelous difficulty, for any Man ſeriouſly to think, That He who was and is ſo full of compaſſion towards all the Sons of Men, even the Worſt of them, ſhould ever give the leaſt conſent unto the *puniſhment*, and gradual deſtruction, of Thoſe who in ſincerity deſire to love and obey Him, and do yet unavoidably *miſtake* in their apprehenſions of ſome few things, pleaded to be according to His Mind, their Love and Obedience unto Him thereby being no whit impeached. When ſome of his Diſciples of old, in *zeal* as they pretended, unto Himſelf, and the Truths preached by Him, would have called for *fire from Heaven*, on thoſe who had *contumelioufly ſlighted* Him upon a ſuppoſed diverſity in Religion, for which they thought themſelves warranted (though falſly) by a *Preſident out of the Old Teſtament*; He lets them know, that it was an unacquaintedneſs with their *own ſpirits*, cauſing them to imagine that to be *Zeal for the Truth*, which was indeed but Self-Revenge, and private Intereſt, which had cauſed them to ſpeak ſo unadviſedly.

Now that *the ſame mind might be in us that was in Jeſus Chriſt*, that His Example is to be a Rule unto us, that we ought all to be *baptiſed into the ſame Spirit with Him*; that what from His Frame of Heart and Actings, as revealed in his Word, we can rationally conclude that He would approve or diſallow, we ought to ſquare our Proceedings and Judgements unto, none that own his Name, can deny.

And if Men would not *ſtifle*, but ſuffer themſelves to be guided by the Power of their Convictions, they would quickly perceive how inconſiſtent with it, are their thoughts of *Rigour* and *Severity* towards thoſe which differ from them in ſome few things relating to the Mind of God in and about His Worſhip.

Certainly this Readineſs of *Servants*; who are themſelves *pardoned Talents*, to fall with violence on their Fellows (upon the account of his Service, though otherwiſe it may be poor and deſpicable in the World) for *leſſer Debts*, and thoſe only ſuppoſed, not proved real, will appear at the Laſt Day, not to have been ſo acceptable unto him, as ſome Men on grounds and pretences utterly forreign unto this whole buſineſs, are willing now to perſwade themſelves that it is. Would men in theſe things, which are principally

cipally *His*, and not their own Concernments, but as *His*, labour to be alwayes cloathed with his Spirit, and do nothing but what they can rationally ſatisfie themſelves, that He Himſelf would do in like caſe; there would be an end not only of this *Debate*, but of many other Miſchiefs alſo, which the *Chriſtian World* is at this day peſtered withal. And it muſt needs ſeem ſtrange that Men can perſwade themſelves that they do that for Chriſt which they cannot once think or imagine that He would do Himſelf. Certainly ſetting aſide provocations and prejudices, any Man who hath but read the Goſpel, and gives any Credit unto it, is a competent Judge, whether *External Force* in theſe Things, do more anſwer the Spirit of Chriſt, or that from which He ſuffered.

But we have not only His Heart and Actings for our Example, but His Word alſo, as revealed by Himſelf and His Apoſtles, as our Rule in *this matter*.

With nothing more doth it abound as to our Duty in this World, than with Precepts for, and Exhortation unto *mutual forbearance* of one another in our Miſtakes and Failings. And although there be force and Light enough in its *General Rules*, to guide us in all particulars, yet leſt any ſhould imagine that the Cauſe under Conſideration, about different *Apprehenſions and Practices in ſome things relating to the Worſhip of God*, might be exempted from them, even that alſo is variouſly inſtanced in; and confirmed by Examples approved by himſelf. The great Apoſtle, who gives us that general Rule, That we *ſhould walk together in one mind*, ſo far as we have attained, and for other things of difference, wait for the Revelation of the Mind of God unto them that differ, *Phil.* 3. 15, 16. every where applyes his *own Rule* unto the great difference that was in thoſe dayes, and long after, between the *Jewiſh* and *Gentile Believers*. The one continued under a ſuppoſal of an obligation to the obſervation of *Moſaical Rites* and *Ceremonies*, from which the other was inſtructed that they were ſet at liberty. This difference, as is the manner among the Sons of Men, wrought various Jealouſies between them, with diſputes and cenſurings of each other; whereof the Apoſtle gives us a full account, eſpecially in his Epiſtle to the *Romans*, *Chap.* 14. 15. Neither did they reſt here, but thoſe of the Circumciſion every where kept their Aſſemblies and Worſhip diſtinct from the Congregations of the Gentile-Believers; Hence in moſt places of note, there were *two Churches*, one

one of *the Jews*, and *another of the Gentiles*, walking at peace in *the Faith of the Gospel*, but differing as to some *Ceremonial Observances*. The whole *Society of the Apostles*, observing *their difference*, to prevent any evil consequent in *their* Assembly at *Jerusalem*, assigned *to the several Parties their particular bounds, how far they should accommodate themselves unto one another by a mutual condescension; that they might walk in Love and Peace, as to what remained of difference among them.* The *Jews* are *taught* by *them not to impose their Rites and Ceremonies on the Gentiles*; and *the Gentiles* to abstain from some *things* for a season, whereunto their liberty did extend, whereby the other were principally provoked.

Their Bounds being so *fixed*, and their *general duty stated*, both parties were left at liberty, as to their practice in the things wherein they could not yet be reconciled: and in that different practice did they continue for many years, until the occasion of their division was, by the providence of God in the destruction of the Judaical Church, utterly taken away.

These were the Rules they proceeded by, this their course and practice, which unquestionably under the Lord Jesus were intrusted with supreme Authority over the whole Church, of that kind which is not transmitted unto any of the sons of men after the ceasing of their Office and Work, and were guided infallibly in all their determinations. *Coercions, Restraints*, corporal punishments, were far from their thoughts; yea, the very exercise of any *Ecclesiastical Power* against them who dissented from what they knew to be truth, so that in general they were sound in the Faith, and walked in their Lives as became the Gospel.

And whereas they sometimes carry the matter to a supposal of disobedience unto those important things which they taught and commanded in the Name of their Lord and Master, and thereupon proceeded to denounce Threatnings against the Disobedient, they expressly disclaim all thoughts of proceeding against them, or any power or warrant from Christ committed unto them, (or any others, or that afterward in his Providence should so be, so to do) with external carnal force and penalties; avowing their Authority over all, that was ever to be put forth in things of that nature, to be spiritual, and in a spiritual manner only to be exercised, 2 *Cor.* 10. 4, 5.

And because the Church might not seem to be disadvantaged by

by this diſclamour of Power *externally*, to *coerce* ſuch as received not the truth that it embraced, and to be caſt into a worſe condition than that of the *Jews* which went before, whoſe Ordinances being carnal, were eſtabliſhed and vindicated by carnal Power: St. *Paul* lets them know, That this alteration is for the better; and the coercion of miſcarriages under the Goſpel, by threatnings of the future Judgment, which would have a ſpecial reſpect unto them, more weighty than the ſevereſt Penalties that were appointed by *Moſes Law*, *Heb.* 10. 28, 29, 30.

Not that *leſſer Differences* in apprehenſions of the mind of God in his Word, had any puniſhment aſſigned unto them under *the Old Teſtament*, whoſe penalties concerned them only who turned away to the worſhip of any other god but the God of *Iſrael*, (and ſuch no man pleads for) But that the whole nature of the Ordinances and Worſhip of the Church being changed from carnal and earthly, to heavenly and ſpiritual; ſo alſo are the Laws of Rewards and Puniſhments annexed unto them. Theſe were the Rules, this the Practice in this caſe, of the Apoſtles of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Theſe Rules, this Practice, hath he recorded in his Word for our Inſtruction and Direction.

Might all thoſe who profeſs Obedience unto his Name, be prevailed on to regulate their judgments by them, and ſquare their proceedings unto them, the Church of God would have peace, and the work of God be effectually carried on in the world, as in the days of old. And for our parts, we will never open our mouthes to deprecate any ſeverity that may be warranted from the Goſpel, or Apoſtolical direction and practice; againſt any miſtake of that importance in the things of God, as our Principles and ways may rationally be ſuppoſed to be. For although we are perſwaded, that what we profeſs and practiſe is according unto the mind of Chriſt; yet becauſe it is our lot and portion to have our *Governours* and *Rulers* otherwiſe minded, we are contented to be dealt withall ſo, as the bleſſed Goſpel will warrant any to deal with them, who are ſo far in the wrong, as we are ſuppoſed to be. And if herein we cannot prevail, we ſhall labour to poſſeſs *our ſouls in patience, and to commit our cauſe to him that judgeth righteouſly.*

This we know, That the Judgment and Practice of the *firſt Churches* after the days of the Apoſtles, was conform to the Rules and Examples that by them were given unto them. Differences

in *External Rites of Worſhip*, which were found amongſt them, where the *ſubſtance of Faith was preſerved*, they looked upon as no breach of *Union* at all. A long Catalogue of ſuch differences, as were from time immemorial amongſt them, is given us by *Socrates* the *Hiſtorian*. And he who firſt diſturbed the peace of the Churches about them, by dividing their communion, (*Victor* of *Rome*) is left branded upon record, with the cenſures of the principal perſons for *Learning* and *Holineſs* throughout the world, *in thoſe days*. Nor is our *diſſent* from the *preſent Eſtabliſhment* of any larger extent, than ſuch as the general conſent of all the firſt *Churches* extended the bond of their communion unto.

Impoſitions of things indifferent, with ſubſcriptions to preciſe determinations on *points* doubtful and ambiguous, with confinements of mens practices in all outward ceremonies and circumſtances of Worſhip, were things not born in the world for ſome hundreds of years after the firſt planting of Churches. *Origen* in his third Book againſt *Celſus* pleads expreſly, That there ever were differences amongſt Profeſſors of *Chriſtianity* from the beginning; and that it was impoſſible but that there ſhould ſo be, which yet he ſhews hindered not their Faith, Love and Obedience. *Juſtin Martyr* in his *ſecond Apology*, declares his forbearance, and the *Churches* of thoſe days, towards thoſe who believing in *Chriſt*, yet thought themſelves obliged to the obſervation of *Moſaical Rites and Ceremonies*, provided that they did not impoſe the practice of them upon others. *Ignatius* before them, in his *Epiſtle* to the *Philadelphians*, profeſſeth, *That to perſecute men on the account of God or Religion, is to make our ſelves conformable to the Heathen that know not God.* *Tertullian*, *Origen*, *Arnobius*, and *Lactantius*, openly pleaded for *a Liberty in Religion, as founded in the Law of Nature*, and their conſiſtence of *Faith* with *Compulſion*, in that extent which we aim not at. The *Synod of Alexandria*, in the caſe of *Athanaſius*, condemns all *external force* in Religion, and reproacheth the *Arians*, as the firſt Inventers and Promoters of it.

It is indeed pleaded by ſome, *That the Chriſtians of thoſe days had reaſon to aſſert this Liberty, becauſe there was then no Chriſtian Magiſtrate, who might make uſe of the Civil Sword in their behalf, or for the puniſhment of Diſſenters from them; and that this was the reaſon of their ſo doing.*

But the *Diſhoneſty* of this pretence is notorious. They affirm directly,

directly, That no force, coercion or reſtraint, is to be uſed in or about the Worſhip of God, nor outward power in a way of *Penalties*, to be exerciſed over the conſciences of men herein.

To ſay they thus pleaded and pretended, meerly to ſerve their own preſent condition and occaſion, but that upon the alteration of things they would be otherwiſe minded, is calumniouſly to reflect upon thoſe holy Witneſſes of Chriſt, the guilt of the higheſt *hypocriſie* imaginable. And men cannot invent a more effectual means to caſt contempt on all Religion, and to root a due ſenſe of it out of the world, than by fomenting ſuch imaginations. Let them therefore reſt in peace, under that reputation of holineſs and ſincerity which they juſtly deſerve; what ever be the iſſue of things with us, or thoſe which may ſuffer with us in the like condition.

But neither were they alone: the great *CONSTANTINE* himſelf, the firſt Chriſtian Magiſtrate with Supreme Power, by a publick Edict declared, THAT THE LIBERTY OF WORSHIP WAS NOT TO BE DENIED UNTO ANY. And until the latter end of his Reign, there were no thoughts of exerciſing ſeverity, with reference unto any diviſions amongſt *CHRISTIANS* about the *WORSHIP* of GOD.

After the riſe of the *Arian Hereſie*, when the interpoſition of Civil Cenſures upon the account of Difference about things ſpiritual, had made an entrance by the ſolicitations of ſome zealous perſons for the baniſhment of *Arius*, and ſome of his Co-partners; it is not eaſie to relate what miſeries and confuſions were brought upon the Churches thereby, impriſonments, baniſhments, and ruine of Churches, make up much of the *Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory* of thoſe days.

After a while, *Arius* is recalled from baniſhment, and *Athanaſius* driven into it. In a ſhort tract of time, *Arianiſm* it ſelf got the Civil Sword in many places, wherewith it raged againſt all the Orthodox Profeſſors of the Deity of the Son of God, as the *Synod of Alexandria* complains.

Much they ſuffered in the days of *Conſtantius*, unto whom the words of *Hillary* in this caſe are worthy conſideration: *Let* (ſaith he) *your Clemency take care and order, that the Preſidents of the Provinces look to Publick Civil Affairs, which alone are committed to them, but not meddle in things of Religion.* And again, *Let your gentleneſs*

ſuffer the People to hear them teaching whom they deſire, whom they think well of, whom they chooſe. GOD TEACHETH, rather than BY FORCE EXACTETH the Knowledge of Himſelf, and aſcertaining the Authority of his Commands by Works of Power, DESPISETH ALL COMPELLED Confeſſion of Him. If Force be uſed to compel Men unto the True Faith, the Biſhops that profeſs it would interpoſe, and ſay, God is the God of the whole World, he needs no compelled obedience, nor requires any ſuch Confeſſion of him. He is not to be deceived, but to be well pleaſed. Whence is it then, that perſons are taught how to worſhip God by Bonds and Perils? Theſe are the words of *Hillary*.

But the ſame Perſons ſuffered more during the Reign of *Valens*, who was diſſwaded from Cruelty againſt the Chriſtians by *Themiſtius*, a Pagan Philoſopher, on the Principles of Common Reaſon and Honeſty; plainly telling him, That by the *way he uſed, he might force ſome to venerate his Imperial Robes, but never any one to worſhip God aright.*

But the beſt Emperours in the mean time bewailed thoſe fierce Animoſities, whereby every Sect and Party laboured to oppreſs their Adverſaries, according as they had obtained an Intereſt in Imperial Favour, and kept themſelves from putting forth their Authority againſt any Diſſenters in Chriſtian Religion, who retained the Foundation of the Faith in any competent meaſure. *Valentinianus* by publick Decree, granted liberty of Religion unto all Chriſtians, as *Zoſomen* teſtifies, *Lib. 6. Ammianus Marcellinus* in his Hiſtory obſerves the ſame, *Gratian* made a Law, that Religion ſhould be free to all ſorts and ſects of Chriſtians, except the *Manichees*, *Eunomians*, and *Photinians*; and that they ſhould have their Meetings free; as both *Socrates* and *Zoſomen* acquaint us.

Neither have they been without their Followers in thoſe Ages wherein the Differences about Religion have riſen to as great a height as they are capable of in this World.

Nor will Poſterity be ever able to take off the laſting Blot from the Honour of *Sigiſmund* the Emperour, who ſuffered himſelf to be impoſed upon by the Council of *Conſtance* to break his word of Safety and Liberty, to *John Hus*, and *Jerom* of *Prague*.

And what did *Charles* the Fifth obtain, by filling the World with Blood and Uprores, for the extirpation of *Proteſtantiſm?* Notwithſtanding

ſtanding all his Victories and Succeſſes, which for a while ſmiled upon Him, his whole Deſign ended in loſs and diſappointment.

Ferdinand his Brother and Succeſſor, made wiſe by his Example, kept conſtant the peace of the Empire, by a conſtant peace granted to the Conſciences of Men.

His Son *Maximilian* continually profeſſed, That the Empire of *Conſcience* belonged unto GOD alone, wherein He would never interpoſe. And upon the Return of *Henry* the Third of *France* out of *Poland*, He gave Him that Advice to this purpoſe, which it had been happy for that Prince, if He had underſtood and followed, before He came to dye. But then even He alſo, having the ſevere Inſtruction given Him of His own Experience, left that as His laſt Advice to his Councellors, That they ſhould no more with Force interpoſe in the matters of Religion.

Rodulphus who ſucceeded *Maximilian*, by the ſame means for a long time preſerved the peace of the Empire. And after he had by the perſwaſions of ſome, whoſe intereſt it was ſo to perſwade him, interdicted the *Proteſtants* in *Bohemia* the uſe of their Religion upon the tydings of a defeat given to his Forces in *Hungary* by the Turks, he inſtantly replyed, *I looked for no other iſſue, ſince I invaded the Throne of God, impoſing on the Conſciences of Men*: and therefore granted them their former Liberty.

Doth not all the World behold the contrary iſſue of the Wars in *France*, and thoſe in the *United Provinces*, begun and carried on on the ſame account: The *Great Henry* of *France* winding up all the differences thereof, by granting Liberty to the *Hugonots*, laid a firm Foundation of the future Peace, and preſent Greatneſs of that Kingdom. Whereas the Cruelty of the *Duke D'Alva*, and his Succeſſors, implacably purſuing the *Netherlands* to ruine on the ſame account, hath ended in the utter loſs of ſundry Provinces, as to the Rule and Authority that he and they endeavoured abſolutely to inthrone, and rendered the reſt of them ſcarce worth the keeping.

The World is full of Inſtances of the like kind.

On the other hand, When by the crafty Artifices and carnal Intereſts of ſome, the Principle of *External Coercion* for leſſer Differences in matters of Chriſtian Religion, came to be inthroned, and obtained place in the Emperial Conſtitutions, and Laws of other Kingdoms, the main uſe that was made of it, was to drive

Truth, and the purity of the Goſpel, out of the World, and to force all men to center in a Profeſſion and Worſhip, framed to the Intereſt of ſome few men, who made no ſmall advantage of it.

According as the Power and Purity of Religion decayed, ſo did this perſwation get ground in the Minds of Men, untill it became almoſt all the Religion that was in the World, That thoſe who ſubmitted not unto the Dictates of them who by various wayes obtained a mixture of Power, Civil and Eccleſiaſtical, into their hands, ſhould be deſtroyed, and rooted out of the Earth.

This Apoſtacy from the Spirit, Principles, Rules, and Commands of the Goſpel, this Open Contradiction to the Practice of the Apoſtles, their Succeſſors, firſt Churches, beſt and wiſeſt Emperours, attended with the woful conſequents that have enſued thereon, in the ruine of Souls, proſcriptions of the Truth, Martyrdom of thouſands and ten thouſands, commotions of Nations, and the deſtruction of many of them, We hope will not be revived in theſe dayes of Knowledge, and near approach of the Judge of all.

We truſt that it will not be thought unequal, if we appeal from the example of the Profeſſors of Chriſtianity under its wofull Degeneracy, unto the firſt Inſtitution and publick inſtance of its Profeſſion: eſpecially being encouraged by the Judgement, Example, and Practice of many *Wiſe and Mighty Monarchs* in theſe Latter Dayes.

The Caſe is the ſame as it was of old; no new *Pretences* are made uſe of, no *Arguments* pleaded, for the Introduction of Severity, but ſuch as have been pretended at all times by thoſe who were in poſſeſſion of Power, when they had a mind to ruine any that diſſented from them.

That the end of their *Conventicles* was for Sin and Uncleanneſs; that the permiſſion of them was againſt the Rules of Policy, and Laws of the Empire; that they were Seminaries of Sedition; that GOD was diſpleaſed with the confuſion in Religions introduced by them; that Errors and miſ-apprehenſions of GOD were nouriſhed in them; that they diſturbed the Union, Peace, and Love that ought to be maintained among Mankind; that they proceeded upon Principles of Pride, Singularity, Faction, and Diſobedience unto Superiors; was from the firſt entrance of *Chriſtianity* into the World, charged on the Profeſſors of it.

The

The ſame Arguments and Conſiderations are conſtantly ſtill made uſe of, and inſiſted on, by all men that intend Severity towards them that differ from them.

And they are ſuch as will evidently ſerve alike any Party or Perſwation, that in any place at any time, ſhall be accompanied with Power: And ſo have been oftner managed in the hands of Error, Superſtition, and Hereſie, than of Truth and Sobriety.

Wherefore the *Biſhop of Rome*, obſerving the unreaſonableneſs of deſtroying Mankind upon ſuch looſe Principles and Pretences as are indifferently ſuited unto the Intereſt and Cauſe of all who have Power to make uſe of them, becauſe they all ſuppoſe the thing in queſtion, namely, *That they who enjoyed Power, did alſo enjoy the Truth*; found out a way to appropriate the whole advantage of them to himſelf, as having attained the aſcription of an INFALLIBILITY unto him, in determining what is the Truth in all things wherein Men do or may differ about Religion, or the Worſhip of God.

This being once admitted and eſtabliſhed, there ſeems great force in the foregoing pleas and reaſonings: and no great danger in acting ſuitably unto them, but that the admiſſion of it is more pernicious unto Religion, than all the conſequents which it pretends to obviate. But where this infallible determination, is diſclaimed, to proceed unto outward puniſhment for ſuch conceptions of mens minds and conſciences in the things of God, as he is pleaſed to impart unto them, which may be true and according to his will, upon reaſons and pretences, invented originally for the ſervice of error, and made uſe of for the moſt part unto that purpoſe, being more fit for that work than for a contribution of any aſſiſtance unto truth, is that which we know not how men can commend their Conſciences unto God in.

Beſides what is it that is aimed at by this *external coercion* and puniſhment? that all men may be of *one mind* in the matter of the Worſhip of God, a thing that never was, nor ever will be by that means affected in this world, for neither is it abſolutely poſſible in itſelf, neither is the means ſuited to the procurement of it, ſo far as it is poſſible. But whom neither the reaſon of the thing it ſelf will convince, nor the conſtant experience of ſo many ages, it is in vain for any to contend withall.

In the mean-time we know, that the moſt of them who agree together

together to preſs for ſeverity againſt us for diſſenting from them, do differ among themſelves in things of far greater importance in the Doctrine of the Goſpel, than thoſe are wherein *we* differ from them: whence it muſt needs be evident to all what is the ground of their *Zeal* in reference unto us and others.

But all theſe conſiderations are quickly in the thoughts of ſome, removed out of the way, by pretences that the *indulgence* and *liberty* deſired, will certainly produce all ſorts of evils both in *Religion it ſelf*, and in the *Civil ſtate*; which being mentioned before in general; ſhall now be a little further conſidered. For this is principally, if not ſolely pleaded for the refuſal and the rejection of them. Neither doth this courſe of procedure ſeem to be *unwiſely* fixed upon; by thoſe who ſuppoſe it to be their intereſt to manage their oppoſition unto ſuch an *indulgence*, wherein yet we hope they will at length diſcover their miſtake.

For whereas the arguments to be in this caſe inſiſted on, conſiſt meerly in conjectures, jealouſies and ſuppoſitions of what may come to paſs, none knows when, or where; it is eaſie for any to dilate upon them at their pleaſure, nor is it poſſible for any to give ſatisfaction to all that men may conjecture, or pretend to fear. Suppoſe all things that are evil, horrid, pernicious to truth and mankind, and when they are ſufficiently aggravated; affirm that they will enſue upon this forbearance, which that all, or any of them will ſo do, no man can tell, and this deſign is ſatisfied. But it is ſufficiently evident that they are all falſe or miſtaken *ſuppoſitions*, that can give countenance unto theſe pretences.

For either it muſt be pretended, that *truth* and *order*, which thoſe who make uſe of theſe reaſonings, ſuppoſe themſelves poſſeſt of, have loſt the power and efficacy of preſerving themſelves, and of preventing the evils ſummoned up to be repreſented as the conſequents of indulgence without external force, and coercion, which they have had ſometimes and elſewhere; or that indeed they have all actually followed and enſued upon ſuch indulgence, in all times and places. The latter of theſe is ſo notoriouſly contradicted by the experience of the whole world, eſpecially of ſundry Kingdoms and Dominions in *Europe*, as *France*, *Germany*, *Poland*, and others, that it may not hope for admittance with the moſt obnoxious credulity. For the former, it is moſt certain that the truth of the Goſpel did never

never ſo prevail in the world, as when there was a full liberty, as unto civil puniſhments, granted unto perſons to diſſent in it, and about it.

And if that which is *now ſo called*, continueth not to have the ſame effect, it may juſtly be feared that it is not indeed what it is called, or that it is not managed in a due manner. It is then altogether uncertain, that upon the indulgence deſired, ſuch variety of opinions will enſue as is pretended, and unqueſtionably certain, that all ſuch as produce practices contrary to civil Society, moral honeſty, or the light of nature, ought in all inſtances of them to be reſtrained. For the conſcience of a man can dictate no ſuch thing unto him, there being an inconſiſtency in them with that ſupreme light, which rules in Conſcience, whilſt it may be *ſo called*. And it is a hard thing to ruine multitudes at preſent ſober and honeſt, leſt by not doing ſo, ſome one or other may prove brainſick, frantick, or vicious, who alſo may be eaſily reſtrained when they appear ſo to be.

And moderate liberty will certainly appear to be Religious ſecurity in this matter, if the power of it, as well as the profeſſion be regarded. For it is the intereſt of them who plead for *indulgence*, to watch and contend againſt errour and hereſie, no leſs than theirs by whom it is oppoſed. For profeſſing all material truths with them, they are not to be ſuppoſed to value or eſteem them leſs than they. And it may be it will appear, that they have endeavoured as much their ſuppreſſion in the way warranted by the Goſpel, as thoſe who profeſs ſuch fears of their increaſe.

They are *Proteſtants* only of whom we ſpeak, and to ſuppoſe that they will not do their utmoſt for the oppoſing of the riſe, growth, or progreſs of what ever is contrary to that Religion which they profeſs, or that their intereſt therein is of leſs concernment unto them than that of others from whom they differ, is but a groundleſs ſurmiſe.

But it is yet further objected, that the indulgence deſired hath an inconſiſtency with *publick peace* and tranquility, the other head of the general accuſation before mentioned. Many fears and ſuſpitions are muſtered up, to contribute aſſiſtance unto this objection alſo. For we are in the field of ſurmiſes, which is endleſs and boundleſs. Unto ſuch as make uſe of *theſe pretences*, we can truly ſay, that might we by any means be convinced of the truth of this ſuggeſti-

on, we ſhould not only deſiſt from our preſent ſupplication, but ſpeedily renounce thoſe very principles which neceſſitate us thereunto. For we aſſuredly know, that no divine truth, nothing really relating unto the worſhip of God, can cauſe or occaſion any civil diſturbances, unleſs they ariſe from corrupt affections in them that profeſs it, or in them that oppoſe it. And as we ſhall labour to free our ſelves from them on the one hand, ſo it is our deſire and prayer, that others may do ſo alſo on the other, which will give ſufficient aſſurance to tranquility. But we are moreover wholly freed from any concernment in this objection, in that, He who is undoubtedly the beſt and moſt competent Judge of what will contribute to the peace of the Kingdom, and what is inconſiſtent therewith, and who is incomparably moſt concerned in the one or the other, even the *King's Majeſty* himſelf hath frequently declared his *Royal Intentions* for the granting of the indulgence deſired, who would never have been induced thereunto, had he not perfectly underſtood its conſiſtency with the peace and welfare of the Kingdom. And as our confidence in thoſe *Royal Declarations* hath not hitherto been weakened by the interveniency of ſo many occaſions, as have caſt us under another condition, ſo we hope that our peaceable deportment hath in ſome meaſure contributed in the thoughts of prudent men, unto the facilitating of their accompliſhment. And as this will be to the laſting renown of his Majeſty, ſo it will appear to be the moſt ſuitable unto the *preſent ſtate of things*, in this Nation, both with reſpect unto it ſelf, and the Nations that are round about us. And we think it our duty to pray, that his Majeſty may *acquire thoſe Glories* in his Reign, which none of his ſubjects may have cauſe to mourn for, and ſuch will be the effect of clemency and righteouſneſs.

We find it indeed ſtill pretended, that *the allowance of meetings* for the worſhip of God, how ever ordered and bounded, will be a means to procure and further ſedition in the Common-wealth, and to advantage men in the purſuit of deſigns to the diſturbance of the Kingdom. But it were equal that it ſhould be proved, that thoſe who deſire this *indulgence* have ſuch inclinations and deſigns, before ſuch pretences be admitted as of any force. For our parts, we expect *no liberty*, but from his Majeſty's favour and authority, with the concurrence of the Parliament; which when we have obtained, (as at no time, what ever our condition be, have we the

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leaſt thoughts or inclinations unto any ſedition or publick diſturbance) ſo having an obligation upon us in the things of our greateſt intereſt in this world, we know not from what ſort or party of men, more cordial adherence unto, and defence of publick peace and tranquility, can juſtly be expected. For where there are *more cauſes* and reaſons of compliance and acquieſcency, than there are on the contrary, it is rationally to be ſuppoſed that they will prevail. And to ſurmiſe the acting of *multitudes*, contrary to their own *Intereſts*, and acknowledged obligation of favour, is to take away *all aſſurance* out of humane affairs.

Neither is there any colour of ſound reaſon in what is pretended, of the advantage that any may have to promote ſeditious deſigns, by the meetings of the Diſſenters pleaded for in the worſhip of God. For doubtleſs the publick peace will never be hazarded by ſuch deſigns, whilſt they are managed by none but ſuch as think to promote and carry them on in aſſemblies of promiſcuous multitudes of men women and children, unknown too, for the moſt part, unto themſelves, and to one another. But theſe things are ſpoken, becauſe they have been wonted ſo to be; other conſiderations to confirm them are none. Conſcience, Intereſt, ſenſe of obligations, the only ſafe rules amongſt men to judge by of future events, all plead an expectation of the higheſt tranquility in the minds and ſpirits of men, upon the indulgence deſired.

And there lies a ready ſecurity againſt the pretended fears of the contrivance of ſedition, in aſſemblies of men women and children, ſtrangers to one another in a great meaſure, by commanding all *Meetings* to be diſpoſed in ſuch a way, as that they may be expoſed to all, and be under the conſtant inſpection of Authority.

As for other courſes of *Severity*, with reſpect to the peace and proſperity of the Kingdom, it may not be amiſs a little to conſider, *who*, and *what are* the diſſenters from the preſent eſtabliſhment. For the perſons themſelves, they are moſtly of that ſort and condition of men in the Common-wealth, upon whoſe induſtry and endeavours in their ſeveral ways and callings, the trade and wealth of the Nation doth much depend. And what advantage it will be to the Kingdom to break in upon them unto their diſcouragement, fear or ruine, we ſuppoſe no man can divine. Thoſe who think there are enough for the work without them, and that their excluſion will make room for others, doth gratifie indeed thereby ſome particular

perſons, intent upon their own private advantages, which they would willingly advance in the ruine of their neighbours; but ſcarce ſeem to have taken a right meaſure of the ſtate of the whole. For whereas it may be *ſometimes*, there may in *ſome places* be too many of them who manage the affairs of Trade and Commerce, when their concerns are drawn unto a head, and a readineſs for their laſt exchange, that there ſhould be ſo of thoſe that do diſpoſe and prepare things alſo, to bring them unto that condition, is impoſſible. It cannot then be, but that the continuance of ſo great fears and diſcouragements upon men, as thoſe which their diſſent from the eſtabliſhed way of worſhip doth at preſent caſt upon them, muſt of neceſſity weaken the Nation, in that part of it wherein its principle ſtrength doth lie. Neither are they a *few* only who will be found to be concerned in this matter, which is not to be deſpiſed. *Pliny*, a wiſe Counſellor, writing to *Trajan*, a wiſe and renowned Emperour, about *Chriſtians*, who were then the objects of the publick hatred of the world, deſires his advice upon the account of their *Numbers*, not that they were to be *feared*, but unmeet to be *puniſhed*; unleſs he intended to lay the *Empire* waſte.

Viſa enim eſt mihi res digna conſultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum; multi enim omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis utriuſque ſexus, etiam vocantur in periculum & vocabuntur; neque enim Civitates tantum, ſed vicos etiam atque agros ſuperſtitionis iſtius contagio pervagata eſt.

So then they termed Chriſtian Religion; for the multitude would ſtill keep the name of Truth and Religion to themſelves: the oppreſſed, the leſſer number, muſt bear the name or title, which they conſent or conſpire to caſt upon them. But the thing it ſelf, as to the perſons at preſent diſſenting from the eſtabliſhed form, is not unduly expreſt. And as it will be an act of *Royal Clemency*, and like to the work of God himſelf, to free at once ſo great multitudes of all ages, ſexes and conditions, from the fears and dangers of thoſe evils, which they are fully ſatisfied they do not deſerve, ſo any other way of quitting the Governours of this Nation from thoſe *uneaſie thoughts*, which an apprehenſion of ſuch an effect of their Rule upon multitudes of ſubjects muſt needs produce, will be very difficult, if not impoſſible. Shall the courſe begun

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in ſeverity againſt them, be purſued? what generous ſpirits imployed in the execution of it, can but be weary at laſt with undoing and ruining families, of thoſe perſons, whom they find to live *peaceably* in ſubjection to the Government of the Nation, and *uſefully* amongſt their Neighbours, meerly because they dare not ſin againſt God, in tranſgreſſing againſt that perſwation concerning his Will and Worſhip, which he hath given unto them? for they cannot but at laſt conſider, that no man erreth willingly, or believes any thing againſt his light, or hath other thoughts of God and his Worſhip, than what he apprehends to be from himſelf, or that any duty is accepted of God, which ſprings from compulſion. How much more Noble and Honourable will they diſcern the work of relieving men ſober and peaceable in diſtreſs, to be, than to have the complaints, and tears, and ruine of Innocent men and their families, continually reflecting themſelves on their minds. Nor is there any probability of ſucceſs in this procedure; for as Time hath alwayes made for Rule, and incouragements which are ſolely in the power of Rulers, have effected great compliance even in things religious, ſo force and violent proſecution in ſuch caſes have been alwayes fruitleſs. For it is known how much they are diſadvantaged as to ſucceſs, in that the righteouſneſs and equity of their pretended cauſes are alwayes *dubious* to unconcerned perſons, which makes them think that the true reaſon of them, is other than what is pretended. When they ſee men whom they apprehend as innocent and guiltleſs as themſelves, as to all the concernments of mankind in this world, purſued with penalties equal unto thoſe that are notoriouſly *Criminal*, they are greatly inclined unto commiſeration towards them; eſpecially if at the interpoſition of the name and worſhip of God in the cauſe, they judge for ought appears to them, they fear God and endeavour to pleaſe him, at leaſt as well as thoſe by whom they are moleſted.

And when they further underſtand, that thoſe whom they ſee to ſuffer ſuch things as they account grievous, and are really ruinous to them and their families, do it for their conſcience ſake, it ſtrongly induceth them to believe that it muſt needs be ſomething good and honeſt that men chooſe ſo to ſuffer for them, rather than to forego. For all *ſuffering* for Religion, they know to be in the power and will of *them that ſuffer*; and not of thoſe that *inflict penalties* upon them: for their Religion is their choice, which they

may part withal, if they eſteem it not worth the hazard wherewith it is attended.

Thus the *Roman Hiſtorian* tells us, in the firſt ſufferings of the Chriſtians at *Rome*. *Quanquam adverſus ſontes, & Noviſſima exempla meritos* (for ſo he thought) *Miſeratio Oriebatur, tanquam non utilitate publica, ſed in ſevitiam aliquorum abſumerentur.*

Nor is it a probable way of dealing with the conſciences of men, eſpecially of *Multitudes* who are able to give mutual teſtimony, and encouragement to one another, yea in ſuch a ſtate of things, dangers of times delight men, and they find a ſatisfaction, if not an honour in their miſeries; as having ſufficient aſſurance, that it is a glorious and a bleſſed thing to ſuffer things hard and dreadful in the world, when they are conſcious to themſelves of no guilt or evil. And therefore as *ſeverity* hath hitherto got no ground on the minds of men in this matter, no more is it like to do for the future. And if it be proceeded in, it cannot be avoided but that it muſt be perpetuated from one generation to another, and a ſad experiment be made, who will firſt be wearied, thoſe that inflict penalties, or thoſe that undergo them. And what in the mean time will become of that compoſure of the ſpirits of men, that mutual truſt, confidence and aſſurance between all ſorts of perſons, which is the abiding foundation of publick peace and proſperity.

Alſo what advantages have been made by ſome neighbour Nations, what at preſent they further hope for, from that great anxiety which the minds of men are caſt into, meerly and ſolely on the account of what they feel or fear, from their diſſent unto the publick worſhip, which to themſelves is utterly unavoidable, is known to all.

But we have done! and what are we that we ſhould complain of any whom God is pleaſed to ſtir up and uſe for our exerciſe and tryal? We deſire in patience and ſilence, to bear his indignation againſt whom we have ſinned; and for what concerns thoſe wayes and truths of his, for whoſe profeſſion we may yet ſuffer in this world, to approve our conſciences unto him, and to leave the event of all unto him, *who will one day judge the world in righteouſneſs.* We know that we are poor ſinful worms of the earth, in our ſelves meet for nothing but to be trodden down under the feet of men; but his wayes and the purity of his Worſhip are *dear* unto him, which he will preſerve and vindicate from all oppoſition. In the mean

mean time as it is our duty to live peaceably with all men in a conſcientious ſubjection unto that Authority which he hath ſet over us, we ſhall endeavour ſo to behave our ſelves, in the purſuit and obſervance of it, as that *whereas we may be evil ſpoken of, as evil doers, Men may be aſhamed, beholding our good Converſation in Chriſt, and give Glory to God in the day of Viſitation.*

Whatever is ours, whatever is in our Power, whatever God hath intruſted us with the diſpoſal of, we willingly reſign and give up to the Will and Commands of our *Superiours*; but as to our Minds and Conſciences in the things of his Worſhip and Service, he hath reſerved the Soveraignty of them unto himſelf, to him muſt we give an account of them at the great Day; nor can we forego the care of preſerving them intire for him, and loyal unto him, without a renunciation of all hopes of acceptance with him, and ſo render our ſelves of all men the moſt miſerable. May we be ſuffered herein to be faithfull unto him, and the everlaſting Concernments of our own Souls, we ſhall alwayes labour to manifeſt, that there is no way or means of Peace and Reconciliation among thoſe who profeſſing Faith in God through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, yet differ in their Apprehenſions about ſundry things ſome way or other belonging thereunto, that is appointed by him, and may expect a Bleſſing from him, but we will readily embrace, and according as we are called, improve to the utmoſt.

And if herein alſo our Endeavours meet with nothing but *Contempt* and *Reproach*, yet none can hinder us but that we may pour out our Souls unto God, for the accompliſhment of his bleſſed and glorious Promiſes concerning that Truth, Peace, and Liberty, which he will give unto his Church in his appointed time. For we know, *That when He ſhall riſe up to the Prey, and devour the whole earth with the fire of his Jealouſie, He will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the Name of the Lord, to ſerve him with one conſent, that the Earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea, his glory ſhall be revealed, ſo that all fleſh ſhall ſee it together, and then ſhall all his people receive from him one heart, and one way, that they may fear him for ever, for the good of them and their children after them, by vertue of the everlaſting Covenant.* And for our own parts, whatever our Outward Condition be, we know he will perfect that which concerns us, and he will not forſake the work of his own hands, *becauſe his mercy endureth for ever.*

FINIS.